

A Fresh Start: Partnering with the Teacher

*By Paul Steffens
Schwablearning.org*

The success of a student with special needs often depends on an open and trusting relationship between his parents and teachers. The start of a new school year provides a great opportunity to begin building a healthy relationship. Here are some tips to get started:

Get To Know One Another

Contact your child's special education and general education teachers before the year begins, especially if he is new to the school. Try to meet with each teacher in person, since face-to-face meetings are helpful to get to know one another. Since the beginning of the year can be hectic, assure the teacher you need only ten minutes. If necessary, follow up with a note or schedule a future meeting.

Things to discuss at this first meeting are:

* **Strengths:** What are your child's strengths? What are his hobbies outside of school? Does he have any special talents? How would you describe his personality? What are his preferred ways of learning? Information like this helps a teacher see your child's broad span of interests and abilities.

* **Concerns:** What concerns do you have about the new school year? What areas seem to be the most difficult for your child? Does he tend to be social or withdrawn? Are there any teaching methods that have had negative results? Could any past issues affect the current school year? This alerts the teacher to your child's challenges.

Strategize Together

Work with the special education and general education teachers as a team. Include your child on this team, if appropriate for his age. What can each of you do to prevent problems from happening?

As a group, discuss the accommodations and modifications that can support your child in his general education classroom. If possible, include your child in these discussions and ask for his ideas. Do you feel your child's IEP accurately reflects his strengths and challenge areas? All teachers appreciate knowing strategies that increase success in individual students as much as possible.

Keep Communication Flowing

Communication between all parties throughout the year is key. Discuss a plan with the teachers for how everyone can stay in the loop, then stick with it! Some ways to keep communication flowing are:

* **Weekly progress reports or activity logs.**

* **Daily planners:** These often have a Parent Notes section where anyone, including the student, can write notes for all to see and comment on.

* **Homework review system:** Homework assignments can be checked and initialed by the teacher, checked by the parent once she has seen it, and then monitored by the special education teacher.

* **Quick notes:** Parents can provide extra information to teachers in the form of notes on assignments, such as, “We spent half an hour on this assignment,” or “Sam only did the even numbered problems because he had to get to bed.”

Be Flexible

A child’s relationship with his school constantly changes. It’s important for parents and teachers to be flexible and change their game plan if things aren’t working. Because each child is unique, strategies and rewards need to be individualized and reviewed regularly.

Maintain a Sense of Humor

There may be times when this is hard to do, but a little laughter can ease tension. It’s natural for people to have differing points of view. Just remember that each person on your team has the best interests of your child in mind. A sense of humor and giving another person the benefit of the doubt can go a long way!

Parents and teachers working together (and with the child) contribute to a child’s success at school. Each depends on the other for information and support throughout the school year. Although difficult at times, the rewards of this collaboration go a long way for everyone involved.